



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE FOUR SENATES OF THE BOEOTIANS

BY ROBERT J. BONNER

IN 421-420 B.C. a treaty which the Boeotarchs had negotiated with the Corinthians was communicated to a body which Thucydides variously describes as "the four senates of the Boeotians," "the senators of the Boeotians," and "the senate."¹ The plain implication of Thucydides' words is that he had in mind a quadripartite federal body. The available information regarding the Boeotian League was both scanty and uncertain until the discovery of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* in 1908, with its brief but admirable account of the constitution of the league. The constitutions of the ten federated cities were uniform. The franchise was limited and the government was administered by four senates, each of which in turn acted as a committee and formulated measures for final action by a joint meeting of the four sections. The federal constitution provided for eleven Boeotarchs and a senate of 660, a court, and an army. P² does not say that the federal senate was quadripartite as were the local senates. On the basis of his silence the editors concluded that Thucydides was wrong in supposing that the Boeotarchs consulted the federal senators. This necessitated the further conclusion that the local senates controlled the foreign relations of the federation.

Serious objections were at once urged against this view. The practice of delegating to local bodies duties involving the main interests of a league is without parallel in Greek federations.³ It involved a cumbersome and tedious procedure. The Boeotarchs would be under the necessity of visiting ten cities and consulting two bodies in each. There are no data for determining how an issue was settled in case of disagreement among the senates, for the Corinthian treaty was unanimously rejected. Under the circumstances narrated by Thucydides a unanimous acceptance would not

¹ V. 38.

² P is used by the editors to designate the author of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*.

³ The only modern parallel cited is that of the Netherlands (Meyer, *Theopomp's Hellenica*, p. 93).

have been strange; but a unanimous rejection by ten different bodies excites the gravest suspicions. It is useless to speculate whether a treaty required the support of all or only a majority of the senates. In any event it is impossible to understand how Thebes could win and maintain a dominant position if she had no more voice in the foreign affairs of the league than small cities like Haliartus and Coronea which were directly represented in the executive council only once in three years while Thebes was represented by four Boeotarchs every year.¹ The objectors also inquired what were the duties of the federal senate of 660 if it had no voice in foreign affairs. Under the more complicated relations of modern life many duties other than those involving the conduct of foreign affairs are assigned to federal bodies; but few of these would be required in an ancient agricultural community.²

The silence of P regarding the treaty-making powers of the local senates is quite as significant as his silence regarding the fourfold division of the federal senate. How could he have failed to record so striking a feature of the system he has described in such considerable detail? And yet, he not only fails to notice this feature but even uses language that seems to exclude the possibility of the intervention of the local senates in federal matters. A clear distinction is made between the local and the federal machinery. The account of the local senates is concluded with the words *καὶ τὰ μὲν ἴδια διετέλουν οὕτω διοικούμενοι*. Then begins the description of the federal constitution. Thus the functions of the local senates are described as *ἴδια*, a word which cannot describe the foreign relations of the entire league. And so according to P the local senates could have had no part in *τὸ τῶν Βοιωτῶν συντεταγμένον*.³

¹ Additional evidence of the ascendancy of Thebes and the means by which it controlled the federal senate is furnished by P. The faction that was in control of the local Theban senate always succeeded with the aid of citizens of other states in controlling the federal senate (*H.O.* xii).

² These arguments were set forth in detail by Dr. Goligher, *Class. Rev.*, XXII (1908), 81 ff. Glotz, *Bull. de corresp. hellénique* XXXII (1908), 272 ff., independently urged the same arguments. Meyer, *Theopomps Hellenica* (1909), reiterated the view of the editors apparently without being aware of the contributions of Goligher and of Glotz. It was not until the appearance of Walker's *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* in 1913 that the view of the editors was defended against these criticisms. Mr. Walker rejects the arguments which I have outlined. The importance of the problem, involving as it does the credibility of Thucydides, is sufficient to justify a restatement of the case with special emphasis on the arguments suggested by Mr. Walker's discussion.

³ *H.O.* xi. Cf. Glotz, *op. cit.*, and Bussman, *Die böotische Verfassung*, p. 27.

It is true that P does not say that the federal senate was quadripartite. But the omission is not significant. In fact I venture to believe that even if Thucydides had said nothing about the "four senates of the Boeotians" modern investigators would eventually have reached the conclusion that the federal senate was organized exactly like the local senates. The purpose of the four-senate system was to facilitate the transaction of business by providing for the discussion and preparation of measures by a smaller body. The federal senate numbered 660. This number in all probability exceeded that of several of the senates in the smaller cities. Consequently the need of some sort of organization for facilitating the transaction of business in the federal senate was quite as desirable as in the city senates.¹ Now the four-senate system either existed originally in all the federated states or was prescribed for them by the federal compact.² In either case it would naturally be employed in the organization of the federal body. The Boeotian πόλις, according to P, was governed by a quadripartite senate made up of men with a certain property qualification. No one, I believe, has concluded from P's silence regarding the federal franchise that it was not the same as the local. Why should more importance be attached to his silence regarding the organization of the federal senate?

Further confirmation of the view that the federal senate dealt with the foreign relations of the league is found in P's sketch of party struggles. The party of Astias was pro-Spartan and that of Ismenias was pro-Athenian. In 394 and for some time previously Ismenias is said to have been in control: καὶ παρ' αὐτοῖς τοῖς Θηβαίοις καὶ παρὰ τῇ βουλῇ τῶν Βοιωτῶν.³ Nothing is said about the local senates outside of Thebes. The issues that divided the parties are nowhere specified, though it is clear that they must have embraced the foreign policy of the federation. Certainly no party could be in the ascendent that did not determine the foreign policy. And if questions of foreign policy were settled in the local senates it is surprising

¹ Cf. the organization of the Athenian senate.

² The adoption of this system by Chaeronea when it became a sovereign city in 424 is significant. Cf. Bonner, "The Boeotian Federal Constitution," *Classical Philology* (1910), p. 414.

³ *H.O.* xii.

that the federal rather than the city senates should have been the fighting-ground for parties fundamentally interested in questions of foreign policy. On the other hand, the situation described by P is entirely natural if the federal senate exercised the regular functions of a federal body. The failure of P to mention the local senates in connection with his account of the party struggles of the Boeotians is in itself sufficient to show that their functions were purely local.

But even if these important considerations are disregarded, the case against the editors' view is still convincing. For, after all, the question resolves itself into a choice between a *statement* of Thucydides and the *silence* of P. There would seem to be but one answer to this question; but it is precisely at this point that Mr. Walker takes up the argument and gives a new turn to the discussion by facing this issue squarely as follows: "We are called upon to choose between the authority of an *obiter dictum*, an incidental remark, of Thucydides, and the authority of a detailed account of P. We have no reason to suppose that Thucydides had any special interest in, or special knowledge of, the Boeotian constitution: we have every reason to suppose that P had both."¹ It does not improve the situation so far as the reliability of Thucydides is concerned to treat a statement regarding Boeotia as "an incidental remark." Thucydides had abundant reasons and opportunities for acquainting himself with the political situation in Boeotia. The war began with a Theban attack on Plataea, aided and abetted by sympathizers among the Plataeans. Athenians subsequently helped to defend the city when it was besieged. In the trial before the Spartan judges the speeches put into the mouths of the Thebans and the Plataeans furnish some valuable information regarding the political history of Boeotia. It is highly improbable that Thucydides undertook to compose them without knowing the leading features of the

¹ *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, 1913, p. 140. The editors sought to lessen the weight of the indictment of Thucydides' authority by characterizing his statement as "somewhat misleading." Gelzer, *Wochenschrift für klass. Philol.* (1914), p. 127, thinks that Thucydides misunderstood his informant: "Wie mir scheint, ergibt sich aus den Worten des Thucydides, dass sein Gewährsmann die städtischen *βουλαί* meinte: die Boeotarchen *παρήγουν γενέσθαι ὁρκους ταῖς πόλεσιν δοῦναι βούλονται ἐπ' ὠφέλῃ σφίσι ξυνομόναι*. Also in jeder einzelnen Stadt befanden die *τέσσαρες βουλαί* darüber, ob man sich mit Argos verbünden wolle." Gelzer's view rests on the assumption that Thucydides' only source of information regarding the powers of the Boeotian senates was the account of the negotiations connected with the Corinthian treaty. For this reason alone it is untenable.

federal constitution which had been in force for twenty years. Even if Thucydides never visited Boeotia during his exile, he had ample opportunities for acquiring information about Boeotian affairs from the numerous Plataean refugees resident in Athens.

There is another aspect of the question that is of immediate interest. Athens controlled Boeotia from 457 to 447. On the withdrawal of the Athenians as a result of the battle of Coronea the federal constitution was instituted. It was a constant source of dissatisfaction to considerable numbers of the inhabitants; and Athens continued to cherish hopes of regaining her former ascendancy by intervening in the interest of these discontented factions. It was not until 424 that a serious attempt was made to realize these hopes. Thucydides was one of the generals that year. It is true that he did not participate in the Boeotian campaign, but it is hard to believe that he or any Athenian general should not know the most striking features of the constitution of a state in which Athens intervened with the assistance of political malcontents. Furthermore, it is altogether unlikely that Thucydides,¹ after correcting a current error regarding an unimportant point in Spartan constitutional practice, should himself betray ignorance about a fundamental feature of the constitution of a contiguous state in whose politics Athens was so deeply interested.

Mr. Walker's reference to "the authority of the detailed account of P" is quite irrelevant, for the case rests not on what P says but on what he does not say. And, as is to be expected in an account limited to 33 lines of Oxford text, there are many omissions of what seem to us to be important details. No Greek federation so far as we know ever subordinated the chief federal body to the local governments; and in view of the evidence of Thucydides and the implications of P's account an *argumentum ex silentio* does not afford a sufficient basis for accepting, in the case of Boeotia, a departure in this regard from the regular practice.²

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

¹ i. 20. 3

² If, as seems likely, the local senates included all citizens, a reference to them would amount to a referendum to the entire citizen body. This could be more easily carried out by means of a general popular assembly rather than by means of a series of local assemblies. There is no trace of a Boeotian popular assembly.